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ABSTRACT

Ask-It-Rite (AIR) is a strategy for improving student teacher questioning and classroom discussion. The procedure allows a class to identify and correct factors, primarily of a social nature, which may be impeding healthy interaction. This manual is meant to accompany two training tapes of the AIR procedure, one for secondary school and one for college teachers. The tapes are intended to demonstrate a simulation procedure which instructors can use in their classes. Description and rationale for the procedure, along with a comprehension check and discussion questions, are included in the manual. (TO)

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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
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Ask-It-Rite Simulation Procedure

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a technique to improve student and teacher questioning and classroom discussion

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FOREWORD

This manual is meant to accompany two training tapes of the Ask-It-Rite procedure, one for secondary school and one for college teachers. The tapes are intended to demonstrate a simulation procedure which instructors can use in their classes. AIR is a strategy for improving student-teacher questioning and classroom discussion. The procedure allows a class to identify and correct factors, primarily of a social nature, which may be impeding healthy interaction.

The secondary school simulation tape is 45 minutes in length, the college tape is 24 minutes in length.

Description and rational for the procedure, along with a comprehension check and discussion questions, are included in this manual.

ASK-IT-RITE—A Classroom Simulation Activity*

There are frequent negative consequences experienced by both teachers and students for asking questions in class. In a typical classroom scenario, a teacher will ask a question to see if the class is following the lesson, or as a reminder to them to remain attentive. The student called upon feels caught. If the teacher asks additional questions, as to help the student deduce a reasoned answer, the student often feels too embarrassed to concentrate and begins rather to feel harassed. This often leaves the teacher to choose between answering his own question or asking another student to respond.

Students experience even greater difficulty in asking questions. When they ask questions, they are risking a number of negative consequences. There is the social discomfort of having engaged everyone's attention while still struggling to frame the question properly. Related is the deeper problem of frequently not really knowing what it is he does not know. Then too, there is the teacher's response. It can range from a statement that the question is irrelevant, to an answer which is considerably more elaborate and expansive than the student really cared to hear. There are many other negative consequences associated with asking questions. So many and so subtle are these, that often the end effect is the virtual loss of this most powerful tool to healthy student-teacher repartee and learning.

Ask-It-Rite (AIR)) is a simulation activity designed to enhance student-teacher questioning and classroom discussion. A simulation is a role-playing exercise which provides practice for an analogous real-life situation. The AIR simulation fuses considerations from inquiry training practices (Suchman, 1961; Sanders, 1966; Manzo, 1969; Manzo & Legenza, 1974) with notions in "interpersonal competence" (Argyris, 1970; Bennis, et al, 1968). Inquiry training, in this context, means improving both student and teacher questioning in order to reduce negative consequences which tend to impede learning. "Interpersonal competence" is a collective term to suggest understanding and skill in positively influencing many of the social/emotional factors which govern human interactions.

Improving Inquiry

The roots of inquiry training as both an aid and objective in learning can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. The current effort was instigated by more contemporary experiences and theories. Bruner

*Paper prepared for International Reading Association symposium on *Reading and Inquiry*, New Orleans, May, 1974.

(1968) observed that effective learning needs something to get it started, something to keep it going, and something to keep it from being random. Working from a similar premise, Manzo (1969) found that students (7 to 26 years old) could be taught to comprehend written material best when taught how to ask questions with the objective of evolving a specific purpose for reading . . . the search for the purpose serving to initiate the learning, with the subsequent charge to answer the purpose serving to maintain learning, and reducing extraneous associations. The teaching procedure concentrated on reducing factors inhibiting student questions and on simultaneously encouraging questioning by having the teacher act as a model of competent questioning behavior. Students asked one-third of all questions during the interaction prescribed by the procedure, versus less than one percent for a control group taught by a more traditional approach.

Subsequent informal observation of student questioning behavior was somewhat discouraging. During more typical classroom interactions, students who had been asking questions showed relatively little evidence of transferring the training: they did not continue to ask questions. In an attempt to better understand, and possibly adjust, the elements discouraging questions, Manzo & Legenza (1974) began a year long study of the questioning behavior of kindergarten children; going back, as it were, to the likely roots of negative conditioning.

The data suggested some useful, though unstartling, conclusions: a) most of the questions asked by kindergarten children in typical "free play" settings are best understood as social-verbal banter, having little apparent implication for the growth of 'manifest curiosity,' or inquiry skill; b) both the number and type of questions asked by children are heavily influenced by the kind of learning situation they are placed in; i.e., questioning behavior could be encouraged or discouraged by manipulation of social-situational considerations. These conclusions seemed consistant with what we had ourselves experienced throughout the grades to college and graduate school. If anything, the primary grade teacher seemed most aware of social consequences associated with classroom learning, with diminishing attention the rule in the upper grades.

The Ask-It-Rite procedure is submitted as one means to help correct this often overlooked influence of situational and interpersonal factors which affect learning. Through this procedure, teacher and students are permitted to suspend typical content objectives long enough to examine, and hopefully correct, the particular set of social-situational factors which they perceive as impeding healthy inquiry and learning.

Ask-It-Rite Procedure

The AIR procedure is most appropriate for secondary school and college classroom situations. Thus far, no experiences have been recorded at lower grade levels, but it may be equally effective there.

Carrying out an AIR simulation requires the assistance of an extra teacher or guidance counselor. Typically eight to ten students are selected to represent the class. The remainder of the class serves as a gallery, making notes to provide objective counterpoint for a post-simulation discussion. The class should be carefully prepared at least a day in advance of a simulation. A review of the procedure immediately prior to the simulation will clarify most conceptions, and set an adult tone for observations which are honest, but not indiscreet.

Simply put, AIR is a "stop action" procedure. The teacher prepares and teaches a typical lesson with students expected to respond as they typically do, with one additional advantage to all: any member of the simulation, including the visiting teacher-director, may suspend the lesson interaction by simply saying "stop action." During this lapse, somewhat like a stage aside, comment is permitted on virtually anything which in that person's opinion may be having a strong influence, positive or negative, on his learning. For obvious reasons, comments tend to deal with negative factors. The advantage of welcoming comments primarily on positive factors is relatively unexplored, but also seems pregnant with possibilities for improving classroom interactions.

The visiting teacher has the best vantage point for orchestrating discussion during "stop action." He can usually de-fuse potentially belligerent responses by encouraging many views to be expressed, subtly demonstrating the complexity of what may appear to be even the simplest observation. In practice, almost no belligerence has been experienced. Both students and teachers seem intent to take advantage of the unusual opportunity to examine their feelings, find the source of their own motivations, and to puzzle over mutually acceptable resolutions, if such are indicated. Some of the most exciting moments in a simulation occur when a position, or observation, is carefully analyzed and possible means of dealing with it are evolved. The resolve is subsequently tried in a "resumed action," during which all persons involved take internal note of whether the change suggested has the desired effect. Sometimes it does not and re-examination, with subsequent modification is again tried.

The positive feelings and improved communications resulting from a simulation seem to reach beyond questioning behavior, to a greater sense of trust in the instructor and his judgment. Teachers embarking on new programming ventures—say a "content area" reading approach—and feeling themselves rather uneasy, will find this a particular advantage. Students benefit in a very special way. Improved poise and knowledge in how and when to ask questions, and why they are being asked questions, helps to give the student a sense of

being able to influence the lesson activity. This, in turn, permits the student to have a more adult relationship with his mentor, and to play a more active and positive role in his own education.

A more precise, data-based documentation of the positive influence of an AIR simulation is being collected by Roberta Ostenberg and Mary Lorton, doctoral candidates in Reading Education, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Two ¾" color cassette T.V. tapes demonstrating the simulation procedure with secondary school and college students are available through the School of Education, Extension Division, University of Missouri-Kansas City. The tapes are very useful for getting a sense of the interaction; they are not equal, however, to the quality of interactions which we have experienced in more typical classroom circumstances, sans lights, boom-microphones, and camera crews.

Aside from the relative merits of an AIR simulation, it seems that simulations generally can provide a lively medium for lessons and experiences far more profound than those presented didactically. Implications for teacher-training seem especially provocative. Simulation experiences tend to combine learning elements such as "discovery," high level student participation, feedback, and modeling in a singularly effective way. The special power of the simulation seems to be in the fact that it permits learning under safe and real-life conditions; it is more than a fire drill, but less than a fire.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF TAPES AND MANUAL

Read the enclosed paper on the AIR procedure either before and/or after viewing either of the accompanying T.V. tapes. Prior to engaging in discussion of the relative merits of the procedure, it is advisable to answer the "comprehension check" questions appearing on the following page. Answers are provided. A forward section also contains heuristic questions for discussion, along with a recommendation for their use.

Please note that while the T.V. tapes have been designed primarily for faculty training, students may also benefit from viewing them. The tapes can help students who will participate in a simulation to better grasp the purpose and the nature of the process.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

These questions assume that the aforementioned paper has been read and that one tape has been viewed. (Answers can be found on the page following.)

1. What is the primary intent of the AIR procedure?

2. Answer a or b:

   a) What were the three elements highlighted in the *secondary school* simulation?

   b) What was the main point to come out of that portion of the *college* simulation which was shown?

3. What appear to be the principle reasons for students not asking more questions in class?

4. Why do teachers tend to respond negatively to student questions?

5. What is the principle psycnological boost to a student who learns how and when to question?

6. What are the advantages to the teacher in an AIR simulation?

7. Briefly outline the steps of the AIR procedure.

ANSWERS TO COMPREHENSION CHECK QUESTIONS

1. The primary intent of the AIR procedure is for students and teachers to discover and correct such things as may be inhibiting effective classroom questioning and healthy student-teacher interaction.

2. a) Highlights of secondary school simulation:

   (1) The teacher confuses students by not treating the simulation as a typical class. She talks about the simulation by referring to earlier conversation.

   (2) Students voice an unreasoned belief in the value of the grammar lesson.

   (3) Students face the fact that class *cannot* always be exciting.

   (4) Students learn that they can enliven a lesson which has become dull with a provocative question, or merely with a request for a medial summary.

   b) College simulation highlights:

   (1) Both professor and class learn that the questions a professor asks are often viewed by students as punitive, sometimes as evaluative, but rarely are the professor's questions understood for what they are, mere attempts to assess whether the class is following the lecture.

   (2) Students often lose the value of a discourse because they are without the benefit of knowing the central question which the lecture is attempting to answer. The instructor needs to periodically restate these, and/or to have class members restate them in their own words.

3. The principle reasons students don't ask questions are:

   a) they seldom realize what it is that they do not know.

   b) asking a question is often tantamount to an admission of ignorance.

   c) they have few role models of good questioning behavior.

   d) the situation isn't conducive.

   e) the teacher often responds negatively.

   f) engaging the class' attention while struggling to frame a question often becomes embarrassing.

g) to ask a question is often to be answered with questions, or with considerably more information than was needed.

4. Teachers tend to respond negatively to student questions because:

   a) they are often poorly worded.

   b) they appear irrelevant.

   c) they can be passive-aggressive (a cloak for hostility).

   d) they often interrupt the logical progression of the lecture/lesson.

   e) to answer one student's question may be to offend another student's perrogative to move ahead.

5. The principle psychological boost to a student who learns how and when to question is really twofold: he has acquired a new, effective tool by which to learn, and he can more positively influence his own education.

6. The primary advantages to a teacher in an AIR simulation are:

   a) better rapport with class.

   b) opportunity to express his personal philosophy of education.

   c) opportunity to learn how to achieve specified objectives with the least degree of social-emotional stress.

   d) opportunity to express to students how questions might best be asked in class and when they would be most welcomed.

   e) learning how to ask questions in a less threatening way.

7. Steps of AIR procedure:

   1. Find a colleague or counselor to assist as 'teacher-director.'
   2. Explain purpose of simulation to your class.
   3. Designate a *finite period of time* during which the simulation activity will take place.

4. Teach a representative lesson, during which any participant in the class may "stop action" to comment on, or critique what is happening within the simulation.
5. 'Resume action' when all are in agreement that the discussion is complete.
6. If a new mode of behavior has been suggested during the "stop action", it should be tried in the 'resumed action' to see if it has the desired effect.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the interests of time and efficiency, it is advisable for smaller groups to discuss a few questions each, and then to share their respective deliberations with the larger group.

1. Why do you suppose it is recommended that a second teacher or counselor be present in a classroom simulation?
2. Why is AIR recommended as a "simulation"? Why not use the 'stop-action' technique in class all of the time?
3. Why would some students find it difficult to 'stop action'? How can they be encouraged to do so?
4. What is the danger in readily accepting a response from a student such as "I think grammar is important?"
5. Might a simulation of this type be useful as a faculty sensitivity-training experience, with fellow teachers playing the roles of students?
6. Would there be any value in having a simulation in which a student plays the role of teacher?
7. Why is it probably not a good idea to do a simulation of this type with a large group?
8. Would there be any advantage for a teacher to play the classroom-teacher role with a class other than the one he typically teaches?
9. Should students be allowed to comment on the behavior of other students during 'stop actions,' as they have been wonting to do in other AIR simulation experiences?
10. Might it not be a good idea to have students role-playing certain "student types," rather than playing themselves?
11. Do you see any dangers in an AIR simulation? Do these, in your opinion, outweigh the potential benefits?
12. What is the implication intended in using the word *Rite* in the name *Ask-It-Rite?*